



Whatever else the Holy Grail is, in the various legends in which it figures, it is always a metaphor for man's highest endeavour, a scarcely achievable ideal. Failure in the quest for the Grail always stems from man's unworthiness or even plain ineptitude. In Chrétien de Troyes's *Conte del Graal*, Perceval is meant to ask a question of the Fisher King. If he asks the right question, the maimed king will be healed and the land over which he rules restored to fertility. With behaviour untypical of his countrymen, the Welsh youth holds his tongue and fails the test that could have healed the Waste Land.

There have been many great movements in history, the altruistic aims of which have been 'to heal the Waste Land'. The ultimate failure of each lay not in the Ideal, but because man, who was made 'a little lower than the angels', is human and fallible. And there is much room for human frailty between the conception of an ideal and putting it into practice; and even more in the maintaining of that ideal in practice. Sometimes the Ideal is achieved, if only in part, and only briefly; ideologies need to be constantly renewed if they are not to become atrophied or repressive.

*The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.*

In this context a shell seems an apt symbol, being as fragile as it is beautiful.

The powerful imagery of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* weaves through the book; *The Hollow Men* gave me its title and some of the threads:

*Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act*

Falls the Shadow

*Those who have crossed
With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom
Remember us — if at all — not as lost
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men . . .*

T.S. Eliot

The Quest for the Grail

If the author of the earliest Grail romance was the Welsh Bledri ap Cadivor, Interpreter to the Norman nobles, it was not just a product of his imagination. The Grail legend is an accumulation of different elements, part pre-Christian Vegetation cult, part Celtic folklore, part Arthurian legend. This medley of semi-pagan traditions became, in the twelfth century, gradually rationalised and Christianised by successive French writers to conform to French and Anglo-Norman tastes and beliefs. The Grail vessel became the cup from which Christ and His disciples drank at the Last Supper or the Passover dish at that meal, but its properties were those of Brân the Blessed's cauldron of rebirth, or the platter of Rhydderch the Generous, providing the food anyone most wanted.

The French romances proliferated for nearly a century, before falling from favour. The theme was not taken up again until Sir Thomas Malory wrote the *Morte d'Arthur* in an English prison almost two centuries later. He described the story of the Sangreal as 'a tale chronicled for one of the truest and one of the holiest that is in this world.' His was one of many versions of the tale; what was common to all was the atmosphere of reverence which invariably surrounded the Grail. It was 'the perfection of Paradise'; 'the springhead of endeavour'; 'that which the heart of man cannot conceive, nor tongue relate'. The Grail translated Galahad from the barren Waste Land of life in this temporal and imperfect world to the eternal rapture of heaven. But other, less-than-perfect knights who sought it suffered hardship, failure or death. The Quest led to the dissolution of the Round Table, the death of Arthur and the ultimate destruction of the Kingdom. The Grail was a holy thing, its supreme experience, the vision of union with God, but achieving it was as terrible as it was sweet. Even Christ in Gethsemane, faced with the imminent agony of His passing, prayed, 'Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.'

'The Otherworld is not a myth but a reality,' wrote Jessie Weston, 'and in all ages there have been souls who have been willing to brave the great adventure, and to risk all for the chance of bringing back with them some assurance of the future life... The poets and dreamers wove their magic webs, and a world apart from the world of actual experience came to life. But it was not all myth, nor all fantasy...'

*'Ah Galahad, Galahad,' said the King, 'for such
As thou art is the vision, not for these.
...one hath sung and all the dumb will sing.
...one hath seen and all the blind will see.'*

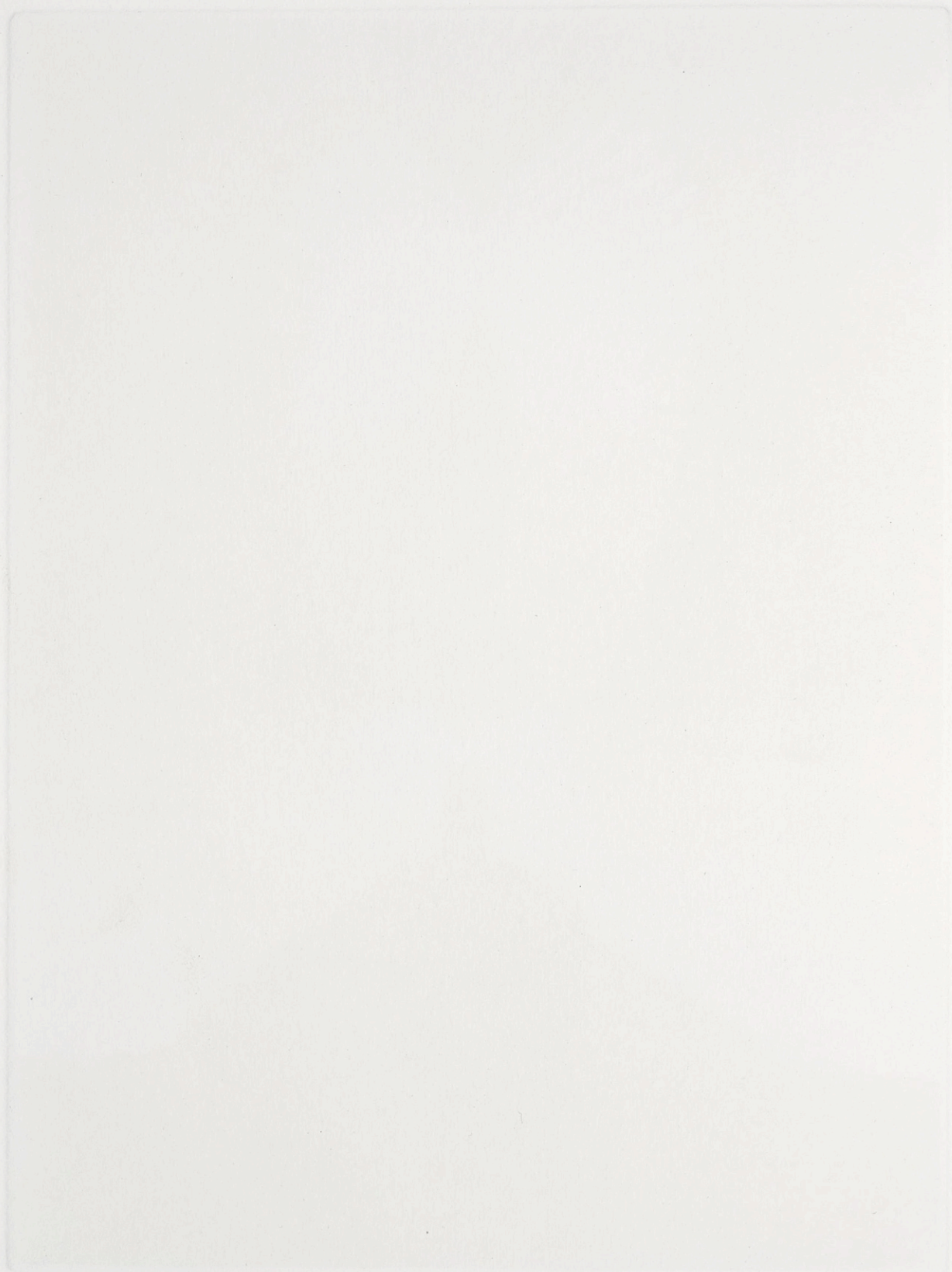
*Thereafter, the dark warning of our King,
That most of us would follow wandering fires,
Came like a driving gloom across my mind...
And every evil deed I ever did,
Awoke and cried, 'This quest is not for thee.'*

Tennyson perceived the Round Table as 'an image of the mighty world', and the Quest a metaphor for aspirations that should be entertained only by those capable of achieving them. But Francis Bacon believed that in all things, 'Not to try is a greater risk than to fail', and Bruno Taut that, 'We must always recognise and strive for the unobtainable if we are to achieve the attainable.'

In our Western civilization, where the present climate is one of increasing cynicism with political systems and dissatisfaction with ideologies that have come to seem bankrupt, such precepts sound grossly misplaced. Yet the proliferation of sects and cults and a swelling tide of fundamentalism indicate, to the authors of *The Holy Blood and The Holy Grail*, evidence of an intensifying quest for meaning and a spiritual dimension in our lives. They conclude in their final chapter: 'Our civilization has sated itself with materialism and in the process become aware of a more profound hunger. It is now beginning to look elsewhere, seeking the fulfilment of emotional, psychological and spiritual needs'. They suggest, tentatively, that the answer may lie once again in a revelation of the Sangreal; no holy vessel, but the 'Sang Réal', the lifeblood or lineage rather than the blood of Christ, protected and preserved for almost two thousand years by a secret order, identified finally as the Prieuré de Sion.

'...it is not necessary to believe in the archaeological authenticity of the Grail to acknowledge its staying power in the literary imagination...' wrote Philip Howard. 'The notion of a problematic search for something that will change the world and one's life for the better is rooted in our psychology.' *We may seek different grails, but many of us are still questing* was the title of his article.





Alas, we know very well that Ideals can never be completely embodied in practice. Ideals must ever lie a very great way off; and we will right thankfully content ourselves with any not intolerable approximation thereto.

Thomas Carlyle



Let no man measure by a scale of perfection the meagre products of reality.

Friedrich Schiller



Nothing is harder, yet nothing is more necessary, than to speak of certain things whose existence is neither demonstrable nor probable. The very fact that serious and conscientious men treat them as existing things brings them a step closer to existence and to the possibility of being born.

Hermann Hesse

What is now proved was once only imagined.

William Blake



*One man with a dream, at pleasure,
Shall go forth and conquer a crown;
And three with a new song's measure
Can trample a kingdom down.*

Arthur O'Shaughnessy



All men dream: but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dream with open eyes, to make it possible.

T. E. Lawrence

*This is true Liberty: when free-born men,
Having to advise the public, may speak free,
Which he who can, and will, deserves high praise;
Who neither can nor will may hold his peace.
What can be juster in a state than this?*

Euripides

Demokratia

'One is the race of Gods and of men; from one mother do we draw our breath. Yet are our powers worlds apart; for we are nothing; but for them the brazen heaven endures forever'. Pindar's recognition of the greatness and the weakness of man is the tragic note that runs through all Greek drama. Athenian democracy was a work of genius, its degeneration was a reflection not on a political system, but on the capacities of human nature.

Solon, at the beginning of the sixth century B.C. laid the foundations of a democratic constitution that in less than a century was to transform a state, torn by economic and political strife to a flourishing city with a new unity. The Athenian Polis became the focus of the political, cultural and moral life of its citizens; their creed being self-discipline, personal responsibility and direct participation in the affairs of the Polis.

'We are called a democracy because the whole people, and not a minority, rule. In our courts, all are equal before the law. We appoint our public officials according to merit or ability, not to family background. No one, not even a pauper, is excluded from politics if he has something to contribute. . . We love the arts, but without lavish display and cultivate the mind without becoming soft. We do not vaunt the riches of our city but we turn those riches to good use. We do not despise a man because he is poor, but we expect him to try to improve his lot. And we believe a man should play his part in political life; anyone who does not, has no place here'.

This, as reported by the historian, Thucydides, was part of the Funeral Oration of Pericles for those who had died in the first year of a war that was the beginning of the end of Athenian Democracy.

It was of course, a morale-boosting speech: 'Remember then that happiness depends on freedom, and that only courage can preserve freedom in this war.' But Pericles was exhorting his besieged, plague-ridden citizens to fight for more than their city or their homes. It was for a way of life that stimulated their highest instincts, developing and enriching their capacities in a way that had no precedent. The power and greatness of the Roman Empire was later to span five centuries, but its state never transformed the life of its members as the Athenian Polis did for over two hundred years. Look at the power and might of Athens. . . generations to come will be as amazed by what we have achieved as people are today.'

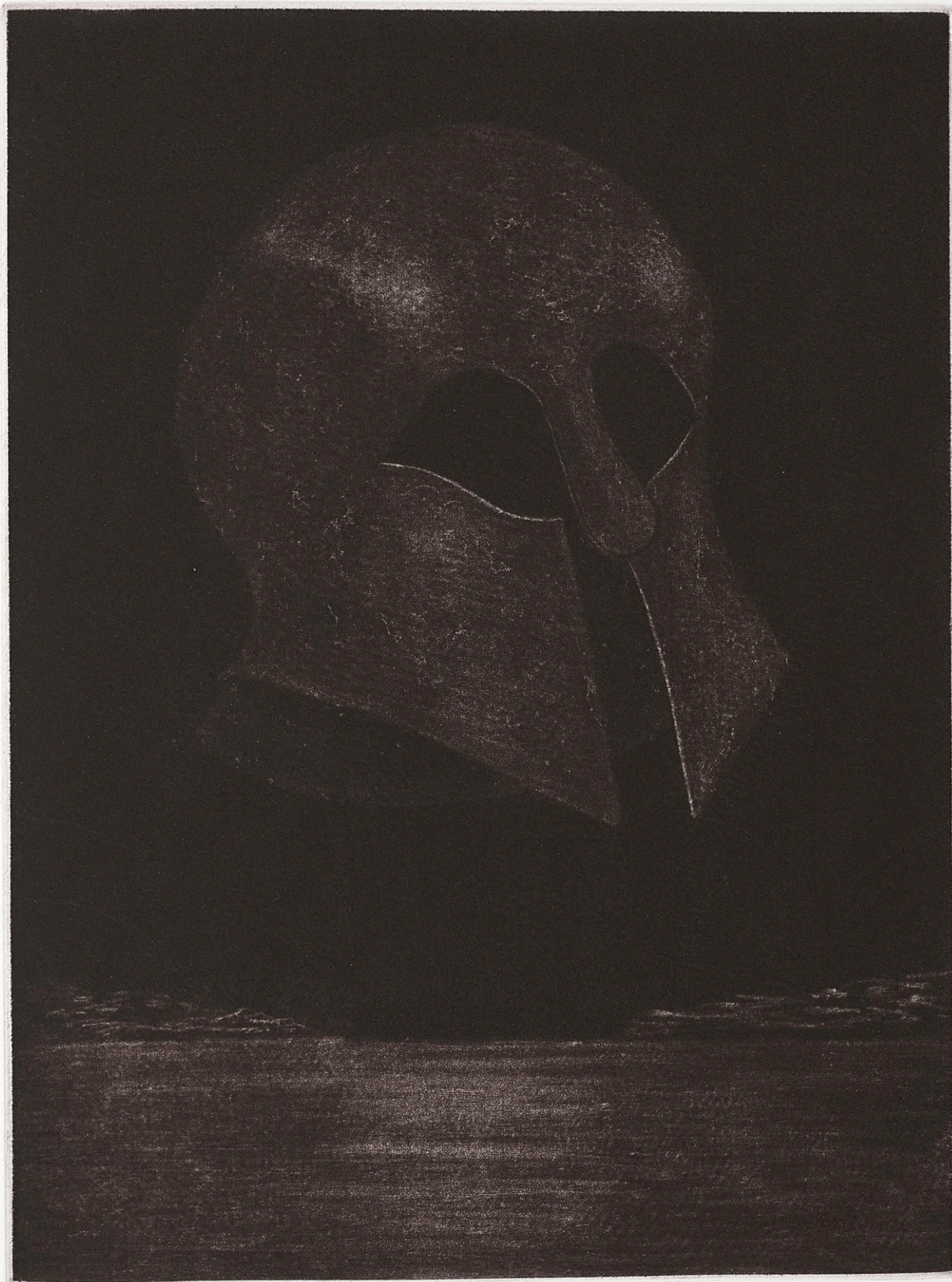
If a political system could accomplish all this, why did it ultimately fail?

Two years after the outbreak of the long-drawn out Peloponnesian War, Pericles died, and with him his message: 'Remember, it is more important for the Polis to prosper than its individual members.' The new leaders, clever, opportunistic men like Cleon, motivated by self-interest, wrought a change in the political climate that was never to be reversed. They vulgarized public speaking, cynically manipulated the Assembly and pandered to the worst instincts of the people. In his comedy, *The Knights*, Aristophanes satirized a democracy that had begun to resemble a mob in the hands of unscrupulous demagogues.

The Sophists, professional educators who taught the use of reasoned argument in public speaking and debating, developed the art of making false ways of thinking seem more plausible than the truth, and fascinated the increasingly cynical young.

In 399 B.C. Socrates was tried and found guilty of intellectual and political 'corruption of the young'. His views were anti-democratic at a time when the democracy was twice overthrown by oligarchies. The reign of terror that accompanied the second was orchestrated by the dictator Critias, an outstanding former pupil of Socrates, as had been the brilliant but unscrupulous Alcibiades, who finally defected to Sparta. Both used the skills they had learned from Socrates to serve their own ambitious ends. But as I.F Stone has pointed out, what had been tried and found guilty was what the Athenian people had prized above all in their democracy: freedom of thought and speech.

The fourth century produced Greece's greatest orator, Demosthenes, who struggled all his adult life to uphold the democracy of Athens against the power of Macedon. It saw the flowering of the genius of Socrates' pupil, Plato, and that of Plato's own pupil, Aristotle. But their greatness could not compensate for what had been lost, and neither believed in the fundamental principle of democracy: that citizens can be trusted to take even the most important decisions because they are free and responsible men. Plato, who was born a year after Pericles died, blamed the decay of Athens, not on corrupt demagogues who debased the democratic process, but on great men like Pericles himself, who devised systems of government which could not be replicated.



The Asiatic master compelled obedience by torture and the lash; the Greeks took their decisions by debating and persuading and then acted like one man; and they conquered.

H.D.F. Kitto



The man who can truly be accounted brave is he who best knows the meaning of what is sweet in life and what is terrible, and then goes out undeterred to meet what is to come.

Pericles



The Greeks believed in liberty, since only the free can realise their natures . . . and that society existed to help a man reach the limits of his gifts. The Gods need no such help, and beasts are below it.

C.M. Bowra



In democracies, the most potent cause of revolution is the unprincipled character of popular leaders.

Aristotle

Phaedrus: I have heard that one who is to be an orator does not need to know what is really just, but what would seem just to the multitude who are to pass judgement, and not what is good and noble, but what will seem to be so. Persuasion comes from what seems to be true, not from the truth.

Plato



It is argued that one who makes an unfair use of rhetoric may do a great deal of harm; this objection applies equally to all good things . . . Men have a sufficient natural capacity for the truth and indeed, in most cases, attain to it.

Aristotle



Aristotle began the Rhetoric with an affirmation that mankind generally had sufficient intelligence to be reached by reasoned argument. Such a faith lies at the foundation of democracy; free government has no future where men can be treated as a mindless herd.

I.F. Stone

*We thinke that Paradise and Calvarie,
Christs Crosse and Adams tree, stood in one place;
Looke Lord, and finde both Adams met in me;
As the first Adams sweat surrounds my face,
May the last Adams blood my soule embrace.*

John Donne

The Great Tree

During the seventeenth century, the English developed a system of Parliamentary government and a freedom of speech unique at that time. The leaders of the House of Commons were drawn largely from the newly empowered and educated middle classes. These confident and increasingly experienced politicians were not prepared to concede English Common Law and custom to Stuart claims of divine right and autocratic power. They perceived the law as being above the King as well as his subjects.

Efforts by the clergy, under Charles I, to increase episcopal authority, while suppressing evangelical practice within and without the Church of England, provoked fierce Puritan reaction. Insistence on religious freedom went hand in hand with an insistence on civil liberties. The Puritans became more than ever Parliament men, while the Church became identified with despotism and royal attempts to be rid of Parliament. The struggle for religious and political ideals resulted in civil war.

Oliver Cromwell, with his credentials as a champion of common rights already established, raised in the cause of God and Parliament, a new kind of army: well-trained, well-paid soldiers whose officers were chosen for the strength of their religious and political principles, not for their social standing. His 'Ironsides' were marked by a democratic tone on social and political questions and unorthodoxy in the forms of their faith. The New Model Army attracted and spawned religious and political radicals; 'Teeming freedom' prevailed.

But when the four year war against the King was won, the question of freedom for whom to do what had to be answered. Revolutionary ideas that had seemed necessary to persuade people to support armed rebellion were now regarded as seditious by alarmed men of property. In the spring of 1647, Parliament tried to disband part of the army without granting arrears of pay or indemnity for acts of war carried out when under orders. With the support of the London Levellers the rank and file elected Agitators who demanded an extension of the franchise and a refounding of the Commonwealth as a democracy. It was a popular movement the Army Grandees exploited for their own ends.

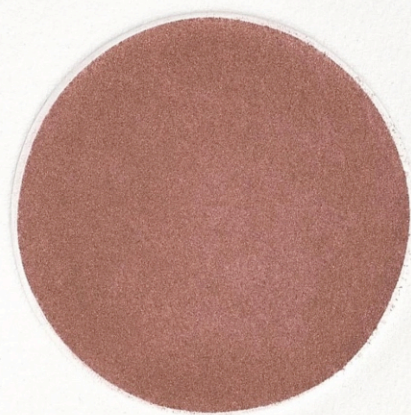
Within a year the King was tried and executed, the House of Lords abolished and England became a republic. But the struggle 'for the people's freedom against all tyrants whatsoever' was swiftly crushed by the Lord Cromwell. 'Is not all the controversy whose slaves the poor shall be?' asked a Leveller pamphlet of that time.

'All men have stood for freedom, and now the common enemy is gone, you are all like men in a mist, seeking for freedom and know not where nor what it is ... And those of the richer sort of you that see it are ashamed to own it, because it comes clothed in a clownish garment.' For Gerald Winstanley, oppression remained a great tree keeping 'the sun of freedom off the poor commons still.' Since 'a man had better have no body than no food for it', he claimed common lands to establish Digger colonies for the starving poor. These were destroyed a year later by Parliament's outraged men of property.

For Lilburne and the London Levellers, freedom was democracy: 'The poorest that lives hath as true a right to give a vote as the richest and greatest.' But Cromwell could not appreciate that people below the rank of gentlemen might genuinely believe that God favoured equality rather than inequality: 'Break them or they will break you,' he thundered to the Council of State, when the Levellers were dragged before them.

Cromwell's belief in the necessity of religious toleration was genuinely radical. The truth of no man who spoke in God's name should be persecuted. But truth sometimes appears in forms unwelcome to authority. When James Naylor made his symbolic entry into Bristol in 1656, riding a donkey with palms strewn before him, an outraged Parliament seized the occasion to put the whole Quaker movement in the dock. In their view, religious tolerance had become a bane. Naylor had served in Parliament's army nine years; now a leader of an organized movement, he was no holy imbecile but wished to demonstrate that a man could perform Christ's work. His act was not received in this spirit. Naylor was flogged through the streets of London, branded and with final savagery, bored through the tongue so that he would never preach again.

John Milton was concerned all his adult life with free will and issues of freedom and tyranny. 'When God gave him reason,' he said of the first man, 'he gave him freedom to choose.' Two years after the death of Cromwell the restoration of King, Lords and bishops, turned the revolution into a tragedy for Milton. He had sacrificed his eyesight for 'the Good Old Cause' but fortunately for English Literature, he did not suffer the hideous fate of many convicted of treason after the Restoration. He wrote *Paradise Lost* to 'justify the ways of God to men.' And perhaps to justify the ways of men to God.



He that can apprehend and consider vice . . . and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true wayfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd vertue, unexercis'd and unbreath'd, that never sallies out to see her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortall garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat.

John Milton



I had rather have a plain russet-coated captain that knows what he fights for and loves what he knows than what you call a gentleman and nothing else.

Oliver Cromwell



*Who would true Valour see,
Let him come hither;
One here will constant be,
Come Wind, come Weather.
There's no Discouragement,
Shall make him once Relent,
His first avow'd Intent,
To be a Pilgrim.*

John Bunyan

The liberty of these times hath afforded wisdom a larger passport to travel than was ever able formerly to be obtained, when the world kept her fettered in an implicit obedience to the three-fold cord of custom, education and ignorance.

Francis Osborne



Though the name of liberty be pleasant to all kinds of people, yet all men do not understand the same thing by it.

Lord Clarendon



Clarendon underestimated the passion for justice and equality which might animate ordinary men. . . He dismissed as 'fanaticism' the flame which burned in a Milton, a Lilburne, a Winstanley. . . But blood, iron and 'fanaticism' go to the making of a revolution, as well as reason.

Christopher Hill

*Nor should we listen to those who say,
'The voice of the people is the voice of God',
for the turbulence of the mob is always close
to insanity.*

Alcuin

Liberté! Egalité! Fraternité!

'When states are democratically governed according to law, there are no demagogues and the best citizens are securely in control, but where the laws are not sovereign, there you have demagogues. The people becomes a monarch...uncontrolled by law...giving honour to those who curry its favour...and the decrees of democracy become the directives of tyranny.' Aristotle wrote his *Politics* two thousand years before the French Revolution but he chartered its course perfectly.

'Everywhere and always a revolution is made by minorities,' wrote Kropotkin. 'Even among those deeply interested in the Revolution it is only a minority that devotes itself entirely to it.' This was the case in France.

'What is our aim? The quiet enjoyment of liberty and equality; the reign of that eternal justice whose laws are written, not in marble or stone, but in the heart of every man, even in that of a slave who forgets and of the tyrant who denies them. We desire an order of things...in which the country guarantees the well-being of every individual, and every individual is proud to share in the prosperity and glory of the country...in which liberty is adorned by the arts which it ennobles, and commerce is the source of public wealth, not merely the monstrous growth of a few private fortunes...and for the vices and follies of monarchy we would substitute the virtues and miracles of a republican government.'

This was Robespierre in the fourth year of the Revolution in which he had remained 'The Incorruptible', amongst a host of men who had not; who had made his own life the embodiment of his creed of virtue. Like Marat, Danton, Desmoulins, he had fought for liberty, for universal suffrage, for the rights of the poor and against religious and racial discrimination. Yet this passionate defender of liberty, advocate of moderation and inspired voice of the people, whose 'champion' he thought too arrogant a title for him to accept, became virtual dictator of a most rigidly authoritarian government, sustained by a rule of terror. The power of the revolutionary government which finally passed to him imposed strict censorship of the press, the arts and all the societies where popular oratory and free thinking had flourished. Religious liberty was non-existent — or even the freedom to be irreligious. 'In the name of liberty, liberty was extinguished.'

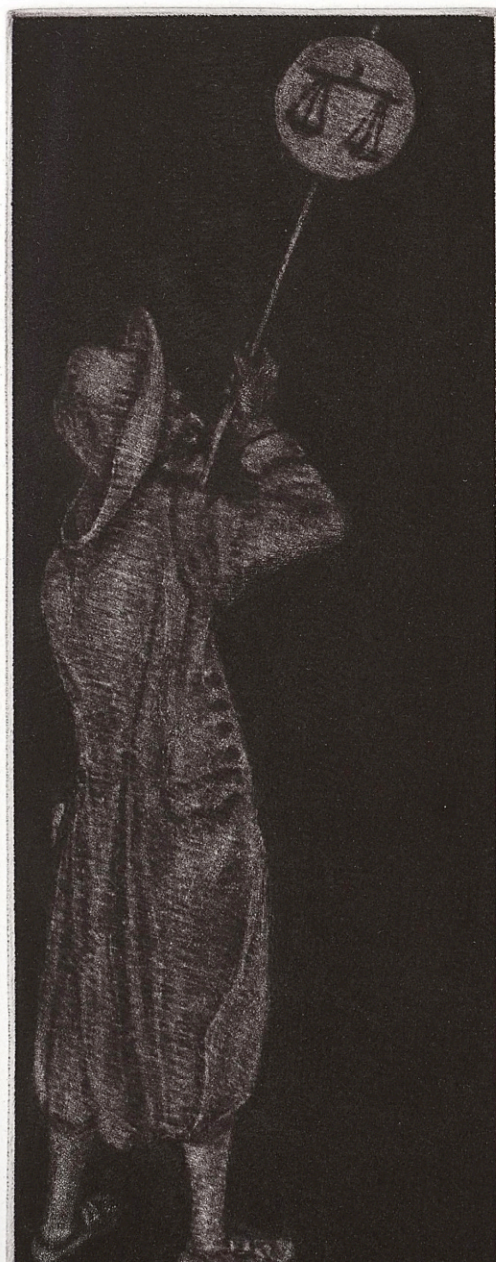
But, 'One must beware of personalities', wrote Lord Elton, 'Great men are a myth: there are none... Men we have called great in history are men who have summed up or stood for the soul of a people or an age.'

The French Revolution was the political and social consequence of a mental revolution that had been taking place for many generations, and not only in France. Of the various political philosophers and economists of the eighteenth century, Rousseau was the greatest single influence on the middle-class revolutionaries in France, the revolution in America the catalyst.

The principles of the revolution were the recognition of individual rights, equality before the law, political and religious freedom and the sovereignty of the people. Rousseau had proclaimed a secular egalitarianism and a cult of the common man. His ideas were embraced by Ideologues, believers in general principles but untrained in affairs. Out of such men the National Assembly was formed: a thousand or so patriotic, well-intentioned, enthusiastic individuals of ability and intelligence, but with no practical knowledge of government or of the real needs of the people they claimed to represent. Gradually, power passed into the hands of a small group, split factionally, and finally to one man. It was recognised that should a dictator arise in its midst he would, as Burke had prophesied, have greater arbitrary power than any monarch had ever had. So against every prominent leader, from Mirabeau to Robespierre, the cry of dictator was raised and played a large part in his fall. The Revolution did indeed devour all its children.

'A revolution cannot be conducted by liberal methods,' Cobban has pointed out. 'Towards those who are hostile or even indifferent it must be a tyranny.' All the leaders of the Revolution believed in the sovereignty of the people even though many of them could not accept that the movement for equality against privilege should be applied equally to the poor. The gulf between what was promised to the wretched 'sans culottes' who had made possible the Revolution's most glorious moments and what was actually granted them remained wide right up until the execution of the king. But the terrible famines following the introduction of military conscription to defend the Revolution brought on near rebellion amongst the starving poor.

The Revolutionary commune of Paris had transformed the suspension of the monarchy into the death of the king. It now began to translate the theory of sovereignty of the people into practice. A tyranny of the many, which Voltaire had recognised might be worse than the tyranny of one, turned into the rule of the Paris mob. Robespierre became the instrument and then the victim of the fanaticism of violence. It was anarchy that ruled.



When despotism has established itself for ages in a country, as in France, it is not in the person of the King only that it resides. . . . Between the monarchy, the parliament and the church, there was a 'rivalship' of despotism, besides the feudal despotism operating locally, and the ministerial despotism operating everywhere.

Tom Paine



For a nation to love liberty, it is sufficient that she knows it; and to be free, it is sufficient that she wills it.

Lafayette



You want liberty without equality and we desire equality because we cannot conceive liberty without it.

Marat

The food necessary for the people is as sacred as life itself. All that is necessary to preserve life is property common to the whole of society. It is only what is in excess of this that may become private property.

Robespierre



I thought that order alone could produce tranquility; that order consisted of a religious respect for the laws, the magistrates and the safety of the individual. . . I thought therefore that the real enemies of the people and of the Republic were the anarchists. . . the excitors of sedition.

Brissot



As man is the greatest of all animals when he has reached his full development, so is he the worst of all when divorced from law and justice. Injustice armed is hardest to deal with.

Aristotle

*But no one has yet devised a way for human beings
to live together; and so it came to pass, amid fitful
lightning flashes, that the days of Europe slid away
into the night, from which the following images
emerge as a shadow-play . . .*

Karl August Varnhagen

Hymnen an die Nacht

'Find in any country the Ablest Man that exists there; raise him to supreme place, and loyally reverence him: you have a perfect government for that country; no ballot box, parliamentary eloquence, voting, constitution building, or other machinery whatsoever can improve it a whit... what he tells us to do must be precisely the wisest, fittest, that we can anywhere or anyhow learn.'

Chilling indeed it must have been to Alfred Cobban, writing *Dictatorship* in 1939, to record those words of Carlyle and identify his inspirational source as Fichte the prophet of German nationalism.

But Fichte was the product of an age dominated by Romantic thought and ideals. The Romantic movement in art, music, literature was not confined to Germany but took exceptionally strong hold there. Goethe's early approval of the emotive and raw dynamism of the *Sturm und Drang* movement had already ushered in a change of mood in the arts, in revolt against the imposed order of Classicism. The aspirations of Romanticism emphasised idealism and individualism; but Goethe's reservations about a movement in which instinct, impulse and emotion began to acquire a quasi-religious significance were sound. He deplored the tendency of the Romantics to confuse the boundaries between art and life and was suspicious of the orgiastic power of music. Most importantly he abominated patriotic thinking and sought to set 'universal humanity' in its place.

But the French occupation intensified patriotic feeling. 'The poets of the great struggle of the nations sang of war, the only form of political activity directly suitable for artistic expression. Their patriotic enthusiasm awakened the eternally and characteristically human feeling of joy in battle and wrath in the fray.' By the reign of Wilhelm II militant jingoism and triumphalism had replaced the romantic vision.

Early in the twentieth century Franz Marc and Wassily Kandinsky tried consciously to emphasise the continuity of thought of the earlier Romantics:

On the broad meadow, there grew a flower.

The flower was blue...

wrote Kandinsky, invoking the passionate longing and search for that mysterious flower of Heinrich von Ofterdingen, the character created by the early Romantic poet, Novalis. They believed they stood at the threshold of a new age, on the verge of the collapse of the old materialistic order. But 'the apocalyptic riders in the air' Marc hoped would purge Europe of nationalistic egotism and lead to moral and spiritual regeneration plunged into the folly and brutality of the Great War.

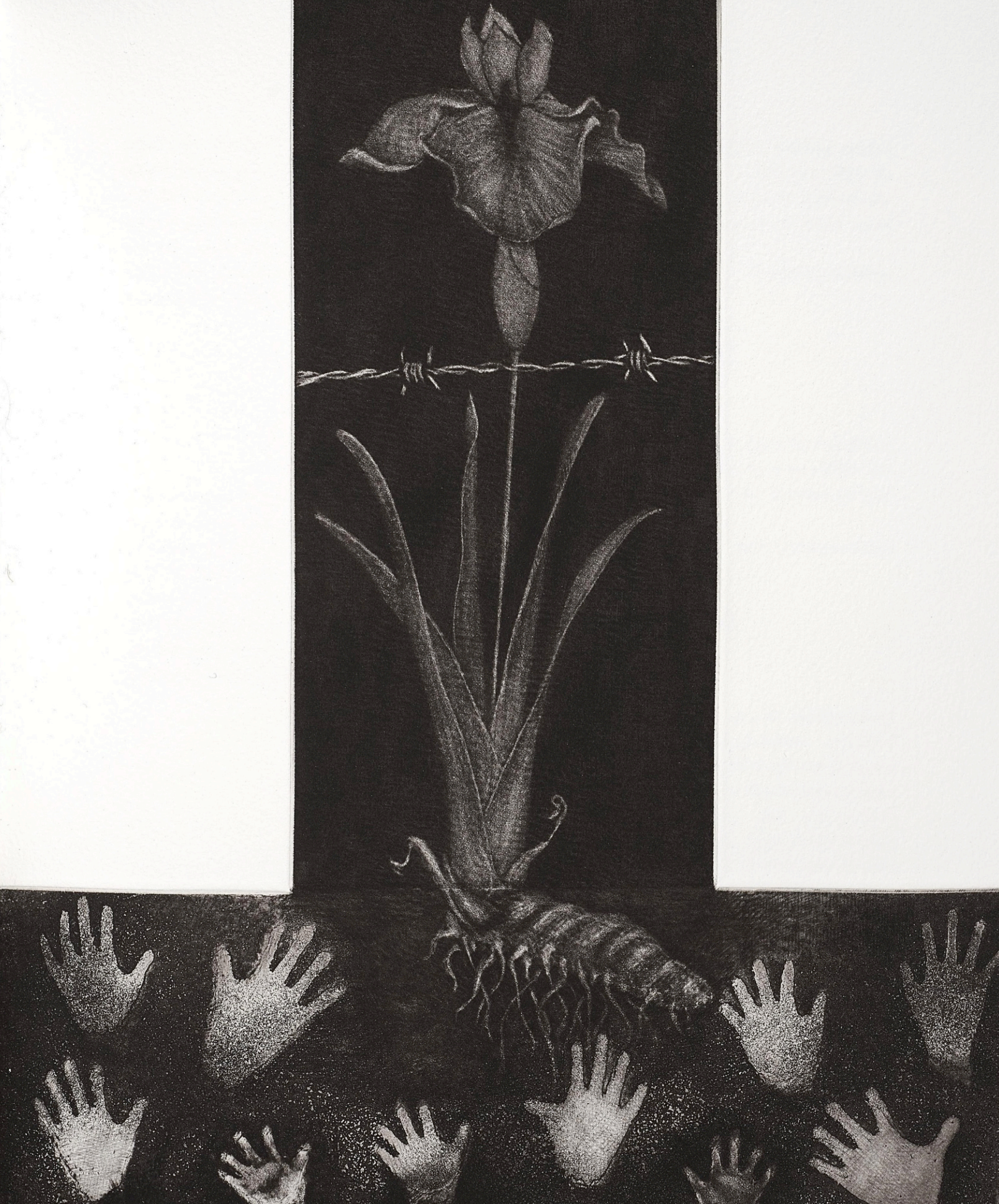
When Germany was defeated in 1918 and the Emperor had fled, the Germans were left in a leaderless limbo, an unfocussed authoritarianism still prevailing. Social and political change was deemed essential, but without any firm consensus as to what form it should take. Great ill-defined ideas were in the air and a notion that social progress was to be achieved through sublime inspiration.

It was the failed painter, Adolf Hitler, with his messianic message of the restoration of the old order and the creation of a greater, more powerful Germany who found increasingly popular support. A generation of disillusioned dreamers unleashed the Third Reich. Long discredited and obsolete values were dug up from the stale soil of Romanticism. Individual freedom was replaced by the assumption of a collective will—that of the Nazi party. It was Thomas Mann who defined National Socialism as German Idealism gone wrong.

Within a short time of becoming Chancellor, exploiting modern methods of propaganda and with an astute understanding of the psychology of the masses, Hitler succeeded in presenting himself as the effective will of the people. As much artist as politician he became the Siegfried come to awaken Germany to greatness, for whom morality, suffering and the 'litany of private virtues' were irrelevant. He brought to the real world the proud imperiousness of the artist as conceived by the earlier Romantics. Andrew Graham-Dixon identifies Wagner as the archetypal German Romantic composer, 'the artist as god, creating and presiding over his own created world.' Hitler recognised the theatrical persuasiveness of Wagner's *gesamtkunstwerk*: writing, visual spectacle, music, light and the human voice. He made the technique his own and Germany his theatre.

But it was the great Romantic theories of purification and the metaphysics of destruction that were to mutate most hideously. Sanctioned by Fichte's ideals of the purity of the *volk* and his division of mankind into superior and inferior races, Hitler fostered a racial fanaticism which assumed manic dimensions, with anti-Semitism an overriding obsession.

Primo Levi survived Auschwitz to write of his experiences there in *The Drowned and the Saved*. Most chilling of all was his warning, that thirty years on, the unimaginable was happening again, in Cambodia; and the West was largely ignoring it. This tragedy too was orchestrated by a criminally misguided idealist with Utopian goals and 'beautiful words' on his lips.



What man of noble mind is there who does not want to scatter, by action or thought, a grain of seed for the unending progress in perfection of his race, to fling something new and unprecedented into time, that it may remain there and . . . leave behind him unmistakable memories that he, too, was a dweller on the earth?

Johann Gottlieb Fichte



The secret sense of sacrifice is the annihilation of the finite, because it is finite. In order to show that it happens for this reason only, the noblest and most beautiful must be chosen, above all, the human being, the flower of the earth . . . The sense of divine creation is first revealed in the enthusiasm for annihilation. Only in the midst of death is the lightning of eternal life ignited.

Friedrich Schlegel



I teach you the superman. Man is something that is to be surpassed.

Friedrich Nietzsche

The 'Gothic Image' of darkly brooding emotion and unrestrained monstrous will was, from the outset, an irrational quest based on a flawed understanding of human nature: a nightmare which Hitler turned to reality.

Fr Dominic Kirkham



The Final Solution was the appalling translation, into genetics, of that idealising strain within German Romantic aesthetics that dreamed of total purity.

Andrew Graham-Dixon



Were we witnessing the rational development of an inhuman plan or a manifestation . . . of collective madness? . . . Neither Nietzsche nor Hitler nor Rosenberg were mad when they intoxicated themselves and their followers . . . but . . . all of them, teacher and pupils, became progressively removed from reality as little by little their morality came unglued from the morality common to all times . . .

Primo Levi

*There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.*

T.S. Eliot

Le Rêve Cambodgien

For Chinese Marxists, the Soviet Revolution was 'the light of freedom dawning'. Communism offered the people of China the possibility of both national salvation and social reform. These two goals dictated the philosophical interpretation of what was essentially a Western ideology. Mao Tse-tung's achievement was to reject Marxism as an empty abstraction and apply it to the concrete conditions prevailing in China, to build a Socialist system on the foundations of a traditionally feudal authoritarian society.

Impetus for change had to come from those who represented the majority of the population: the Chinese peasants, whose political passivity sprang not simply from grinding poverty but from the way enculturation had reinforced their sense of hopeless apathy. It was necessary to neutralise that influence and to combat Confucian prejudice regarding the superiority of mental over manual workers. The Cultural Revolution was instigated not as a mere humbling of the existing bureaucratic and technocratic élite but as a means of breaking down the dead weight of traditional deference to authority, even of party leaders.

Ever a philosophical pragmatist, Mao recognised the importance of intellectuals to help form, and administrators to implement Party policy. But that policy, he insisted, should be evolved 'from the masses to the masses': a continuous spiral of absorbing the scattered and unsystematic ideas of the masses and returning those ideas in a structured form. When the excesses of the first two years of the Cultural Revolution threatened to degenerate into anarchy, Mao launched his 'Back to the Countryside Movement'. Over a period of eight years, twelve million students were sent to the countryside to work with and learn from the peasants.

The economic development of Communist China is unquestionable; whether it would have done 'better' under a capitalist government is unanswerable. When asked whether he thought the French Revolution had been a success, Mao replied that it was too early to tell. The Chinese goals were, in any case, idealistic: 'What we emphasise is man's value, a higher level of cultural civilization and a greater sense of security'.

Culturally, economically and geographically, China was a good model for Communist revolution in Asia and certainly exerted an influence on the emergent Communist Party of Cambodia. Yet the Khmer Rouge, as they came to be known, were inspired by none of the goals of Chinese Communism, while in a brief period of time being guilty of the worst excesses of Stalinist Russia. Its leader was a charismatic school-teacher called Saloth Sar, who took the name, Pol Pot.

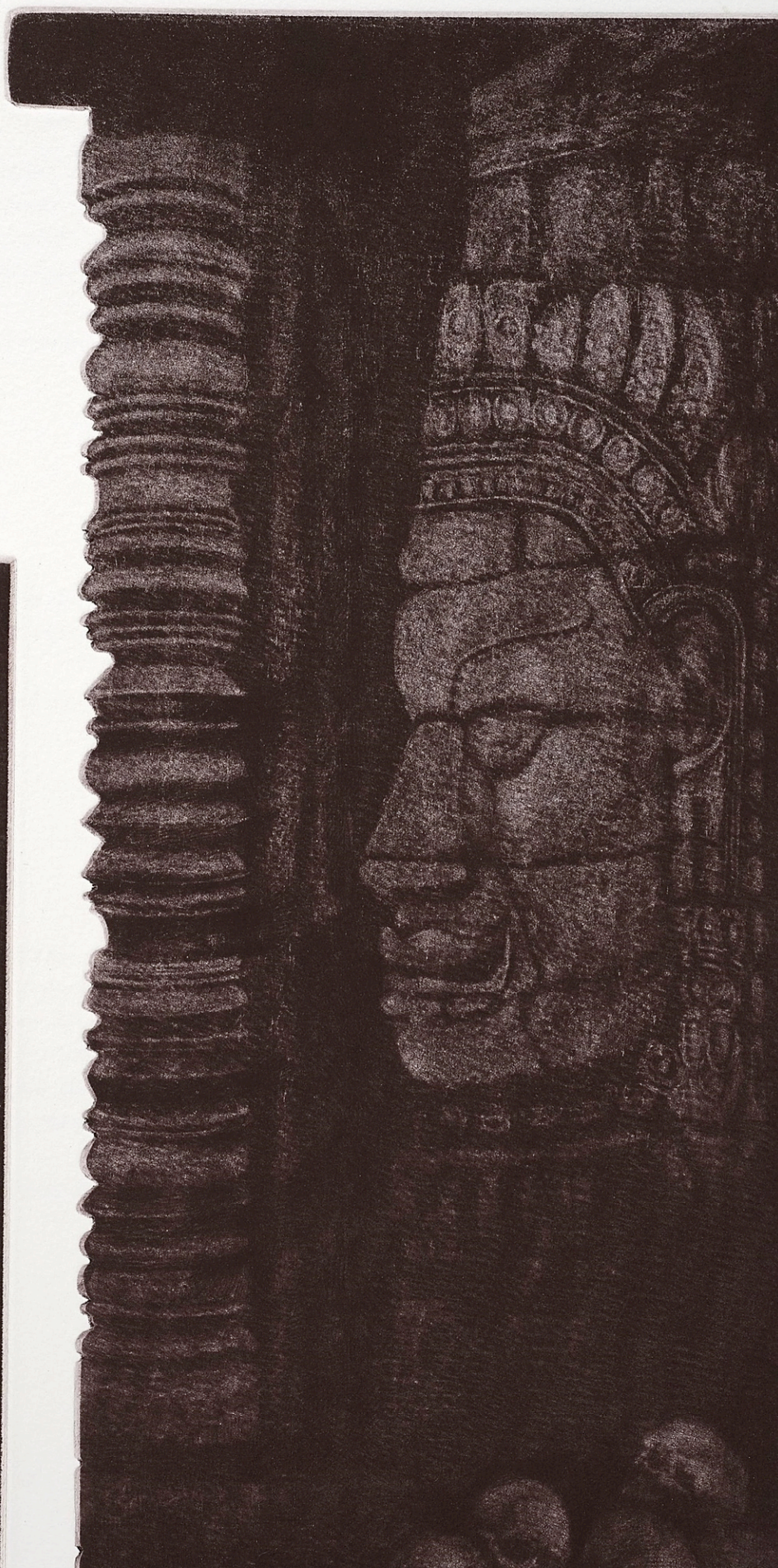
The future Pol Pot was the least intellectual of the group of Cambodian students who formed a Marxist cell in Paris in the early 50s. He returned to Phnom Penh with no qualifications and, judging by his earliest political writing, an understanding of history as uncertain as his grasp of political analysis. He joined the fledgling Communist movement, working always undercover, his élite connections providing immunity from police harassment. As a teacher in one of the private colleges which had become a haven for radicals unqualified to teach in the state system, he was able to proselytise his culturally deferential students. His cover was not blown until 1963 by which time he was Brother Number One in the Khmer Communist movement.

He spent seven years in hiding, isolated from events in Phnom Penh and elsewhere in the world. His Utopian ideals, never put into practice, remained untested and, with cultural respect for hierarchy, unchallenged by subordinates. The metaphorical school he now taught in had neither parents nor inspectors.

When Sihanouk was overthrown in 1970, the civil war was the coming to a head of twenty five years of political, economic and class conflict, and was fought with unremitting savagery on both sides. Three years later, the withdrawal of military aid by the Vietnamese Communists and the devastating bombing by the U.S., who were not even at war with them, resulted in the Khmer Rouge gaining thousands of enraged recruits and transforming its forces. Their attack on Phnom Penh in 1975 'was a madness born of desperate isolation, which bred a dreadful hatred of their enemy and a contempt for the attitude of the outside world.'

It was these brutalised, psychologically damaged and increasingly youthful forces the victorious Pol Pot used to carry out his notorious evacuation of the cities and coercion of the population into economic programmes. Franz Schurman has noted: 'When a revolution destroys a social system, it also annihilates its élites. The new revolutionary regime can only pull society together again through organization.' But there was neither organization nor control, only daily propaganda inciting class and racial hatred, and muddled directives not understood by a dislocated, politically ignorant peasantry.

'Build and defend' was Pol Pot's central slogan, but it was not the building of an egalitarian society; militarism, racism and expansionism are what dictated his programme. Politically, he turned the clock back, not to the glory of Angkor, which was his publicised aim, but to a feudal society of slave labour, a people materially, intellectually and morally destitute.



A revolution is not the same as inviting people to dinner or writing an essay or painting a picture... A revolution is an uprising, an act of violence whereby one class overthrows the authority of another...

Mao Tse-tung



Men... learn... from the governments they live under, and retaliate the punishments they have been accustomed to behold.

Tom Paine



What harm is there in not executing people? Those amenable to labour reform should go and do labour reform, so that rubbish can be transformed into something useful. Besides, people's heads are not like leeks. When you cut them off, they will not grow again. If you cut off a head wrongly, there is no way of rectifying the mistake...

Mao Tse-tung

Even if we must expend a million lives, our party must not regret it; it must be established forcefully!

Pol Pot



If someone suffers from malaria, he needs only take up a pick and break earth in the sun; he will be cured because of his high political consciousness.

Pol Pot



1977 was a terrible year. There were a thousand people in the village, but by the end of 1978, there were no men left to plough the land.

Mekong ferryman



Pol Pot has blamed the failure of the revolution on others... The failure of the revolution, however, is not the point... without his inhuman policies, one million Cambodians might not have died in less than four years, pointlessly and often in great pain.

David Chandler

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